If you truly want to make a difference with your decision in this case, I would like to put forth some things for you to consider, and to help clarify the situation. I am by no means against Microsoft being a player in the computer market. However, I am on the side of consumer choice.

First and foremost, the ultimate solution will not come from taking care of one symptom of the problem. The root of the problem needs to be dealt with, and that is what this letter is intended to point out. While bundling a web browser with the operating system, and making it an integral part of the operating system could be looked on as a "problem", there is a deeper problem which, if dealt with in a fair manner, would remedy ALL of the "symptoms".

A bit of background is needed at this point. The idea of an operating system is very new. The concept of what it actually does was never even considered before computers were invented, and to this day, most people can't sufficiently explain its purpose. To call it a "bridge" between hardware and software is a very simplistic view. Let's create an analogy to help explain it further.

Let's say the computer hardware is an automobile. Would the operating system be the engine? No, the processor would be the engine. So, what would the operating system be? I like to think of it as the gasoline. The car can't go anywhere without gasoline. This is still a fairly simplistic view, but as I continue the analogy, perhaps it will become more clear.

So, what would applications be in this analogy? Let's make the applications be cities in this analogy. The car has to go to a given city to do a certain task, and it has to move around in the city to get the task done. When you are working in a word processor, writing a letter, you have to go through various menus to change fonts, format the text, save the document, and print. In our analogy, we would drive our car to a typeface store, and get our typefaces, go across town to a formatting store, go to the bank to store our work in a safe deposit box, and go to a printer to have it printed out.

I think you can start to see how much work, and how important an operating system is. But now let's get to the root of our problem. When we go into a city, imagine if we could only buy one brand of gasoline. Imagine if we were required to use that brand of gasoline to perform our tasks in that city, even if we had found a different brand of gasoline that we like better, or gives us better gas mileage, or

produces less emissions, or for any other reason, we like a different
gasoline. This is where the problem lies.

For anyone to be able to go to Microsoft Office City, or Wordperfect
Suite Metropolis, or any other major city, consumers either have to
drain their gas tanks of their chosen gasoline and buy gas from
Microsoft, or have two tanks, one for Microsoft gas. This totally
eliminates consumer choice. Would this be legal in society if it were
not in the computer realm? I don't think so. If the "gasoline" were
blended a certain way to limit pollution, I can see it happening.
However, the gasoline would not be from just one company. Instead, all
gasoline companies would blend their fuel to this required standard.

Hopefully you now understand the underlying problem, and I would like
to proceed with my ideas to create a solution. The very first part of
the solution is to provide for the standard that the "gasoline
companies" can blend their fuel to. For this, I would suggest that
Microsoft provide full documentation of the API (Application
Programming Interface) for all of their operating systems, including
the "undocumented" API's which Microsoft keeps to itself for Microsoft-
written applications. This should be available to anyone who asks for
it, so that operating system programmers (such as Linux, FreeBSD, BeOS,
etc) can write an extended API, which will then allow any application
that was written for Windows to be run on any operating system. This
would allow consumers freedom of choice for operating systems (free to
choose the "gasoline" they want to use).

An additional measure beyond this solution would be to have various
programmers get together and devise a "standardized" API. Basically,
coming up with a completely new API which would take advantage of the
choice of operating system capability. Perhaps creating an API which,
when installing the application, the installer would convert the
application for the best performance with whichever OS it is installed
under.

Second, there should be nothing in any contracts or programming that
prevents the use of other operating systems, such as in a dual-boot
setup. Microsoft has had contracts with its dealers that stated that a
non-Microsoft operating system could not be installed to dual-boot with
a Microsoft operating system, when the computer was sold to a customer.

Finally, I would like to comment on the file system and file formats.
The file system is the underlying structure that dictates how files are
stored on the hard drive. Think of it as how your file folders are
arranged and labeled in your file cabinet. This information should be
provided to computer developers so that one operating system can read
files from another operating system's drive. File formats deal with
Microsoft Office, not the operating system itself. However, if
consumers choose not to go to Microsoft Office City, they should be

able to read documents created there, especially if it is claimed to be a "standard file format". Older file formats are readily available for computer programmers to write translators, but the newest file formats coming out of Microsoft are not. The information regarding the file format either needs to be provided so that other document-handling applications can read these new file formats, or these file formats should not be allowed to be called "standard".

I hope this letter has provided useful insight to help with your decision. Again, I would like to say that I am not against Microsoft, but rather I would prefer if everyone was on a level playing field, and Microsoft can compete equally next to other operating systems, rather than Microsoft having the tools to keep vital information away from other operating system programmers, preventing competition. If Microsoft was in the position of having to actually compete for its share of the computer operating system market, I think you would find that innovation, stability, and user-friendliness would come much more quickly to consumers.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to post my comments on this subject. For the sake of the future of the Computer and Information Age, I hope you make the right decision.

Scott Lagaly